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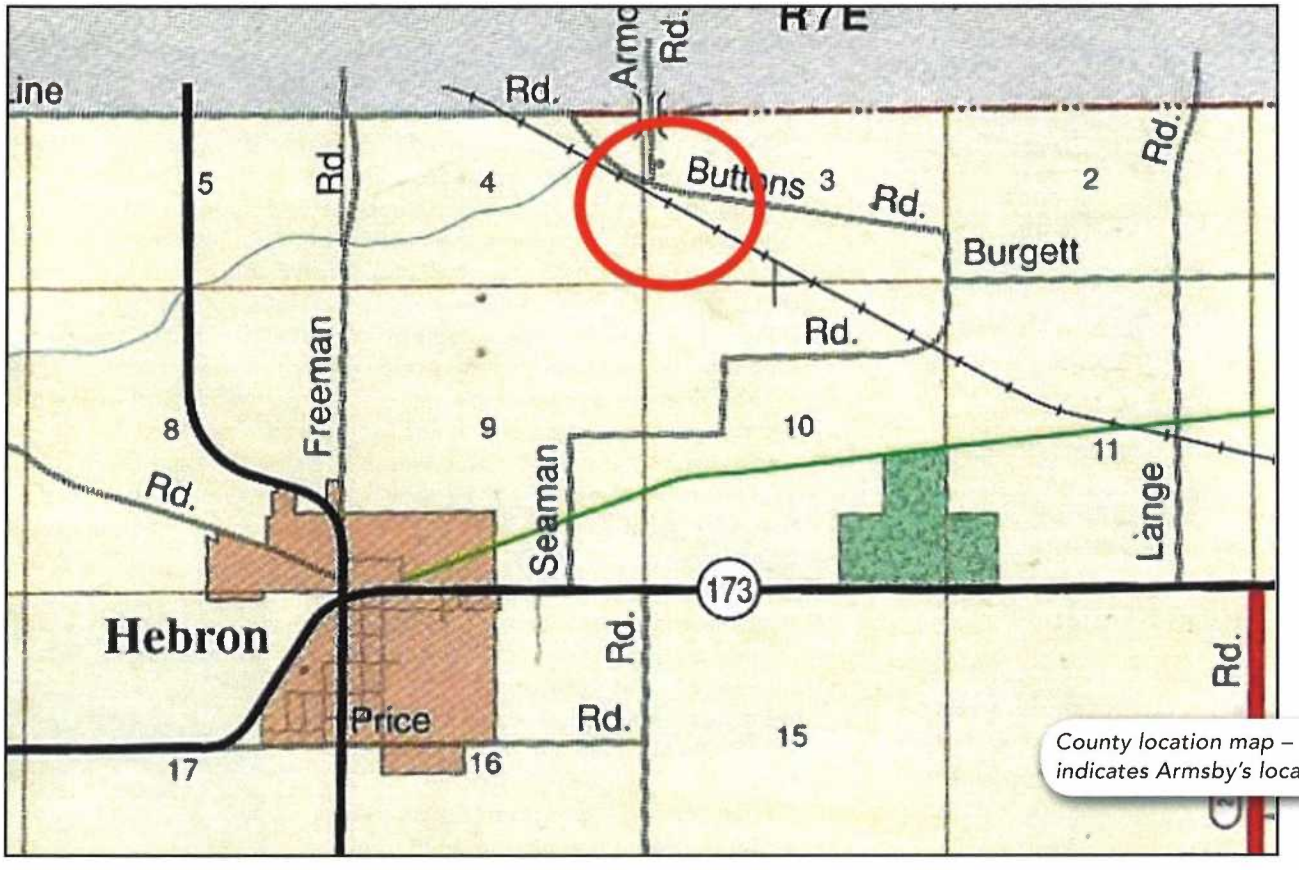

County location map – red circle indicates Armsby's location

Ghost Towns of McHenry County:

Lost to time, this community left the rails before it started

By CRAIG L. PFANNKUCHE

The McHenry County Historical Society's research library yielded a notice from the Sept. 12, 1901 edition of the Woodstock Sentinel: "County Surveyor C.H. Tryon of Woodstock has surveyed and platted a new town at Armsby, the station on the C.M. & St. P. R.R. northeast of the Village of Hebron. The town is on the W.V. Andrews farm and lots will be sold at low prices."

While working with a local surveyor, attempting to resolve some boundary and ownership information, McHenry County Division of Transportation Project Engineer Ernest J. Varga rediscovered a piece of history lost to time.

Working in conjunction with the county assessor and recorder offices, the county DOT was able to piece together fragments concerning a turn-of-the-century, trackside community platted near the juncture of Buttons and Armory roads. It was named Armsby.

"It took uncovering and finding records dating back to

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The Tracer is a quarterly publication carrying local history topics, news and information for members of the McHenry County Historical Society.

Our museum is located between Routes 20 and 176, at 6422 Main Street in Union, Illinois

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1 to 4 p.m. Tuesday through Friday, third Saturdays

McHenry County Historical Society members enjoy FREE admission.

OUR MISSION STATEMENT:

We engage and educate current and future generations by preserving and sharing McHenry County history.

(An Illinois Not-for-profit 501c3 Corporation)

We Appreciate Our Members!

President's Column

A funny thing happened on the way to the county history museum

A funny thing happened to me on the way to our museum one day in spring 2018. I got inspired! And why not? Who doesn't love a good underdog story?

Yes, our museum is the story of McHenry County and McHenry County is the story of America. It is a story of the people, by the people and for by the people. Often, with little but the clothes on their backs, these people pursued the dream that we should all have an equal opportunity to live a good life.

Memories the society has preserved – a continuum of almost 200 years worth of artifacts, a real 1843 log cabin, two one-room schoolhouses, an 1885 town hall, and an 1898 church – all remind us of our shared history. The Founding Fathers guaranteed the rights to freedom of speech, religion and private property, and our ancestors built the greatest nation in the world because of those rights.

The society preserved these valuable things, and what they stand for. We must not take these things for granted.

In the summer of 2018, I was invited to be on the board, and one year later, I was asked by Molly Walsh and Mary Ott – two people that have given so much of themselves to the society, if I would consider being president. How could I say no?

So, in awe of the efforts of the people that preceded me, I humbly assume the presidency. But in the back of my mind, I'm thinking of what Abraham Lincoln said: "I am a success today because I had a friend who believed in me and I didn't have the heart to let him down."

I don't know if I can do this thing as well as the presidents before me, but I don't have the heart to let you down. Besides, no one has asked me to move a log cabin. How hard can it be?

But we do have serious challenges ahead. We have old buildings to keep open to the public. We need more space to house our growing collections. And we need to accomplish this without any government subsidies.

Nevertheless, we can meet these challenges – with your support. Please consider a donation as part of our Annual Appeal to defray the operating expenses of our wonderful museum and other buildings. Consider giving friends and family a Christmas gift membership.

"Keep Us Going, Keep Us Growing." And, above all, have a Happy Holiday!

~ Bob Wagner, president
Board of Directors

This 1947 photograph shows a sampling of the equipment and experiments that surrounded Armstrong in youth. The house in Yonkers, N.Y. eventually became a National Historic Landmark in January 1976. It was demolished in February 1983 and was removed the National Register of Historic Places three years later.

Photo provided by the National Park Service.

WILA's original programming, creativity and signal strength were key as it made history

By KURT BEGALKA

If you are like most folks, you probably never heard of Edwin H. Armstrong, but this New York engineer and inventor was responsible for the technology that brought McHenry County it's first radio station.

Years after inventing the super heterodyne, which enabled headphones to be replaced by speakers, Armstrong solved radio's biggest problem: static. In 1933 he successfully tested frequency modulation, or FM, which enabled stations with the same frequency to not interfere with other.

"Radios simply pick up whichever FM station is the strongest," notes the Economic History Association of La Crosse, Wis. "This means that low-power FM stations can operate in close proximity."

On June 17, 1936, FM radio was demonstrated to the Federal Communications Commission for the first time.

In September 1948, what is purported to be McHenry County's first radio station began broadcasting. Station 92.1 FM, operated by the Northern Illinois Broadcasting Co., christened a 316-foot tower on Howard Benton's farm with a bottle of champagne a month earlier. Investment partners were Benton, who served as the station's general manager, influential attorney David Joslyn and George Huffman, owner of McHenry County Land Co. in Woodstock.

The tower, christened as a "monument" to broadcasting, was located 3 miles west of Woodstock on Franklinville Road. It allowed the signal to extend 50 miles – into parts of Lake, Kane and Boone counties, as well as across the Wisconsin line.

The Crystal Lake Herald reported that, "Telegrams and telephone calls are pouring in to congratulate WILA on its clarity. One man phoned from Chicago to say that it was the best FM station he has every heard. 'My radio hasn't even got an antenna,' he declared, 'and yet your music and speaking comes in beautifully.'"

The studio for "The Voice of McHenry County," was located at 122 ½ Benton St. in town. The entire cost of the station was $45,000.

According to a Benton family history, Howard originally wanted the call letters WILL as a homage to Woodstock, Ill., only to learn that the University of Illinois had beaten him to the punch. The FCC assigned the call letters WILA.

The station was on the air for 18 1/2 hours daily and for

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10 hours on Sunday. Firsts included airing a special program simultaneously with station WBNB in Beloit and hosting the first teletype, direct wire news service – provided by United Press International.

Programs included "All Star Western Theatre" with Roy Willing and His Rider of the Purple Sage. But there also was a great deal of original, local programming. It included special, at-the-scene reports dubbed "Town Salute," as well as local basketball and football games; the children's program, "Alice in Animal Wonderland;" "Hi-Neighbor Girl," singer Darlene Adams, and a women's talk show hosted by Alice McConnell, wife of local politician A.B. McConnell.

"I love radio – its immediacy and especially its intimacy … it is part of your live, whispering into your ear. You can't see it but, equally importantly, it can't see you."
~ Malcom Turnbull, former prime minister of Australia

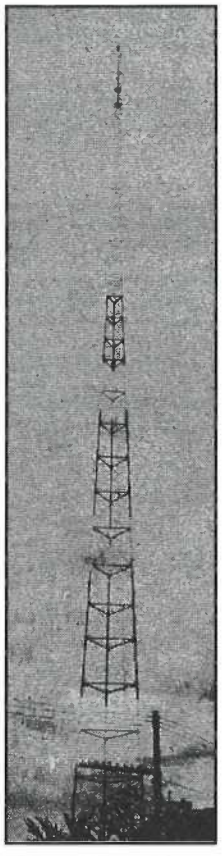
There also was a great deal of religious programming, including "Chapel By The Side of the Road" – presented by the Rev. Earl Olsen, preacher at the Marengo and Riley Methodist churches. Ironically, the McHenry County Historical Society took charge of the 1898 Riley Methodist Church in 2009.

John Russell Ghrist, in his 1996 book, "*Valley Voices – A History of Radio Broadcasting in Northern Illinois and Northwest Indiana from 1910-1992,*" noted the "hype and aesthetic enthusiasm" of WILA wore away by its third year. It closed with little fanfare in 1951.

Station engineer Bruce Steinke attributed its demise to changing tastes and an expensive lawsuit filed by three employees who had been hurt in a serious car accident while doing a remote. By the time Ken Marunde bought the Benton farm in 1957, most of the tower had been dismantled.

Benton's son, Jim, recalled the station's end this way:

"Unfortunately for radio, even FM radio, television was coming into its own. Although the station enjoyed a substantial following of loyal sports fans and country music devotees, the inevitable change in the style of home entertainment forecast the 'Voice of McHenry County's' eventual demise. By the time the decade of the '50s arrived, the station had run its course and the equipment, the office furnishings, and the vast collection of records and transcribed programs were sold off at a loss. … Many folks in the Woodstock area still remember WILA, as it left a trail of fond memories for the ones it tried to serve. The station was just too early for its time." ◆



The transmission tower off Franklinville Road proved quite the topic of conversation during its construction. The tower weighed more than 85,000 pounds and was anchored by 60 tons of concrete. A beacon at the top served as a warning for airplanes.

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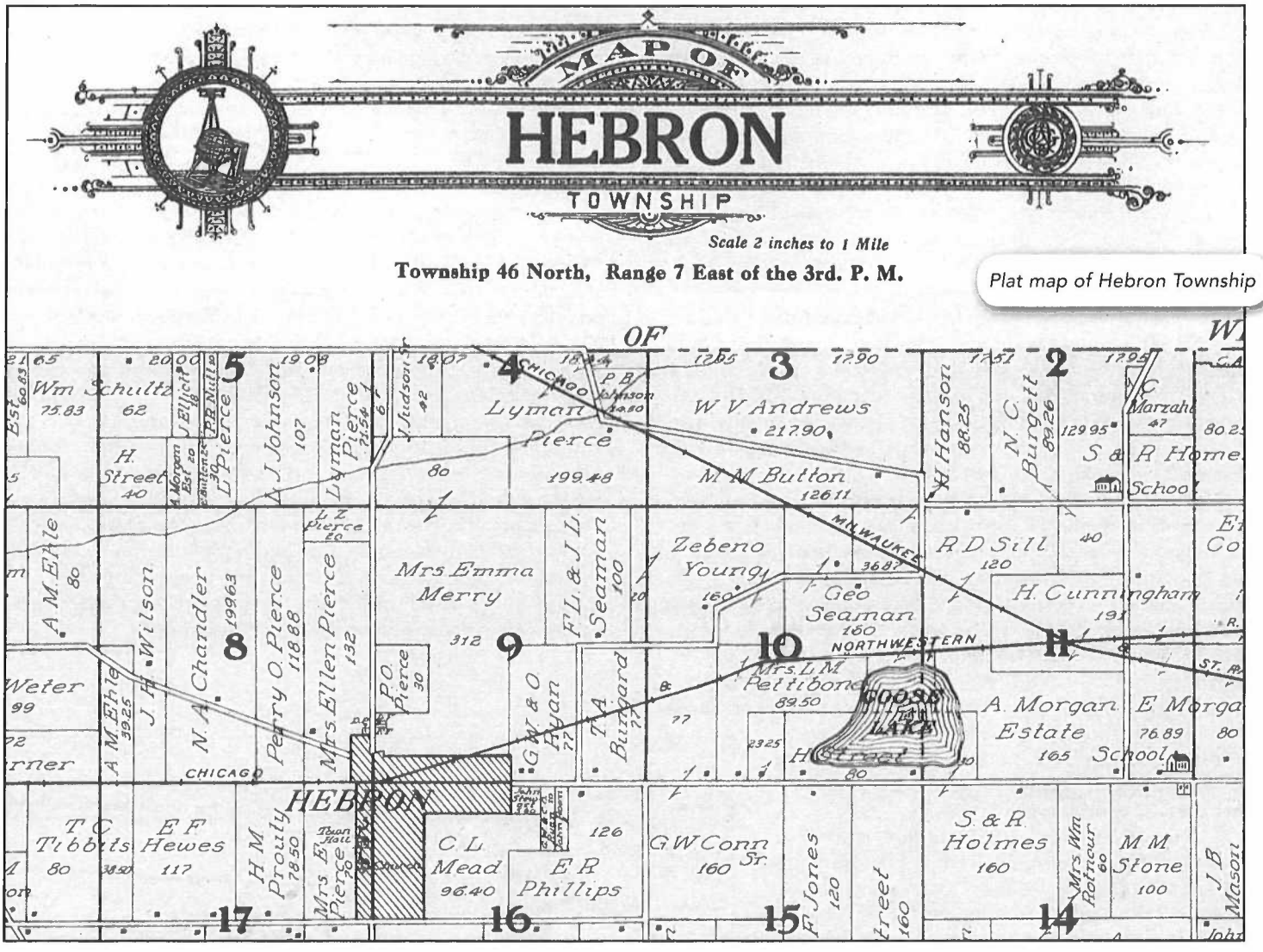

Plat map of Hebron Township

the beginning of the 20th century (1900) involving one of the railroads that ran through McHenry County, in order to piece together what happened up in Hebron Township near the Wisconsin state line," Varga said. "It was determined, in the course of the investigation, that the new railroad's alignment would require relocating a part of what was then an existing road, Buttons Road."

That road, which led to the Buttons' farm more than a century ago, still exits.

Northern McHenry County was served by a railroad since the mid-1850s when the Fox River Valley Railroad pushed north from Elgin through Crystal Lake, McHenry and Richmond to Genoa City, Wis. The area around Richmond also was served by the Kenosha, Rockford and Rock Island Railroad Co., which ran from Kenosha, Wis. to Rockford – passing just a few miles to the north of Richmond by 1864.

The line's backers hoped that it would bring agricultural production into Wisconsin, rather than to Chicago, which would make Kenosha an equally important Lake Michigan port. Similarly, the purpose of the Fox River line was to draw the area's agricultural production down into the Chicago market. The two lines remained competitors until the late 1860s, when both lines were merged into what would become the Chicago and North Western Railroad (C&NW).

Area farmers happily found that service on both lines was not curtailed by the merger. An 1895 train schedule for the Kenosha line shows that three freight trains and one passenger/milk train ran east and west every day but Sunday. The Fox River Valley route saw three trains and one freight train passing through Richmond each way to and from Lake Geneva in 1879.

While the C&NW was spreading its tracks across the county, the leadership of another railroad, the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul Railroad (Milwaukee Road) was attempting to figure out just how to compete with the North Western. The problem for the Milwaukee Road's management was that they did not have a similar strategically placed mainline stretching west.

While the North Western had lines which ran from Chicago to Rockford, as well as one which ran directly to Clinton, Iowa, on the Mississippi River, the Milwaukee Road's west main line ran from the Mississippi River at Savanna across rough country east through Freeport to Beloit, and Elkhorn and Sturtevant (south of Milwaukee) in Wisconsin – but not directly to Milwaukee. The Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul did not reach its namesake city of Chicago until 1872. The North Western, on the other hand, had gotten into Milwaukee by 1855.

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Even more disastrous for the Milwaukee Road's bottom line was that traffic, generated for the route in southwestern Wisconsin headed for Chicago, had to go all the way east to Sturtevant before it could be routed south into the city.

In 1883, Milwaukee Road managers thought about the construction of a cutoff line from its east-west main line near Madison, Wis. It would run to Janesville and then down into Chicago at Roundout, Ill. (east of Libertyville) where the line would connect with the Milwaukee Road's main line to Chicago. However, financial difficulties kept the plan from coming to fruition.

It was not until 1899 that the Milwaukee Road acted on the plan to build such a cutoff. This time the routing would be from Roundout through Libertyville, Fox Lake, Spring Grove, and Solon Mills. It bypassed Richmond to the south and entered Wisconsin to the west of that community. The line would continue into Wisconsin, passing through Zenda, Walworth and Darien to Janesville.

Listed in the 1900 federal census of Hebron (see map) were two men, Walter V. Andrews and Alexander Stewart. Both were railroad workers. Stewart was listed as being an "Agent RR" while Andrews listed occupation was a "RR postal clerk." A search of all the annually published listings of C&NW's "Agents and Officers ....." booklets does not list anyone named Alexander Stewart in McHenry County between 1895 and 1923. Nor does he show up in the "Retired Personnel" card file or any other C&NW personnel files held by the Chicago and North Western Historical Society. He is not mentioned in either of the 1903 or 1922 published biographical histories of McHenry County.

All we know from his 1900 federal census listing is that he had been born in New York state in August 1869. That is it.

Much the same is true for Walter Andrews. As a "railroad postal clerk" he was not actually an employee of a railroad but, rather, an employee of the United States Post Office. A mention is made in his death notice that he "retired in 1923," but no such person is listed in any personnel files held by the C&NW Historical Society. He is not mentioned in either of the 1903 or 1922 published biographical histories of McHenry County.

But we do know that Walter V. Andrews married Lizzie Fenner, a daughter of Hebron Township residents Hamlin and Phoebe Fenner, on Jan. 3 1882. The 1900 census lists the couple as living in Hebron. Lizzie Fenner Andrews' obituary in the March 5, 1914, *Harvard Herald*, states that the bride and groom took up farming to the south of Hebron "for 18 years until Mr. Andrews took up the occupation of railway mail clerk."

He still owned the house on that site, just east of Greenwood Road and south of Route 173 in Section 13 of Hebron Township, as late as 1908.

On Dec. 6, 1897, Hamlin Fenner deeded over to Walter V. Andrews the north half of Section 3 in Hebron Township. It is likely that Andrews had been approached by a land agent of the Milwaukee Road to purchase a slice of his land for a right of way between Roundout and Janesville. He also may have been involved with Alexander Stewart, who may have been the Milwaukee Road's land buyer.

Shortly after Milwaukee Road's construction crews began to lay rail on the newly graded roadbed, the Milwaukee Road agreed on Sept. 12, 1901, to grant Andrews the right to build a station stop next to his land and along that right of way. In early October 1901, Andrews hired Charles H. Tryon, the official McHenry County surveyor, to draw up the plat for a small community on his land around a railroad station. It consisted of four blocks of land, within which lots could be sold for the new village. Specifically, the village was located along what is called Button Road immediately east of where it connects with Armory Road. Andrews called his newly platted community "Armsby."

A surviving family member in Custer County, S.D., confirmed the location of this would-be town on the northeast corner of Buttons and Armory roads, Varga said. He attributed its current manifestation – Armory Road – to consonants "inadvertently changed" over the years.

"To attract more farm trade and people to the location, the railroad also dedicated a road, entirely on part of its own property, to allow and attract travelers from Wisconsin to the new community via a new Armsby Road."

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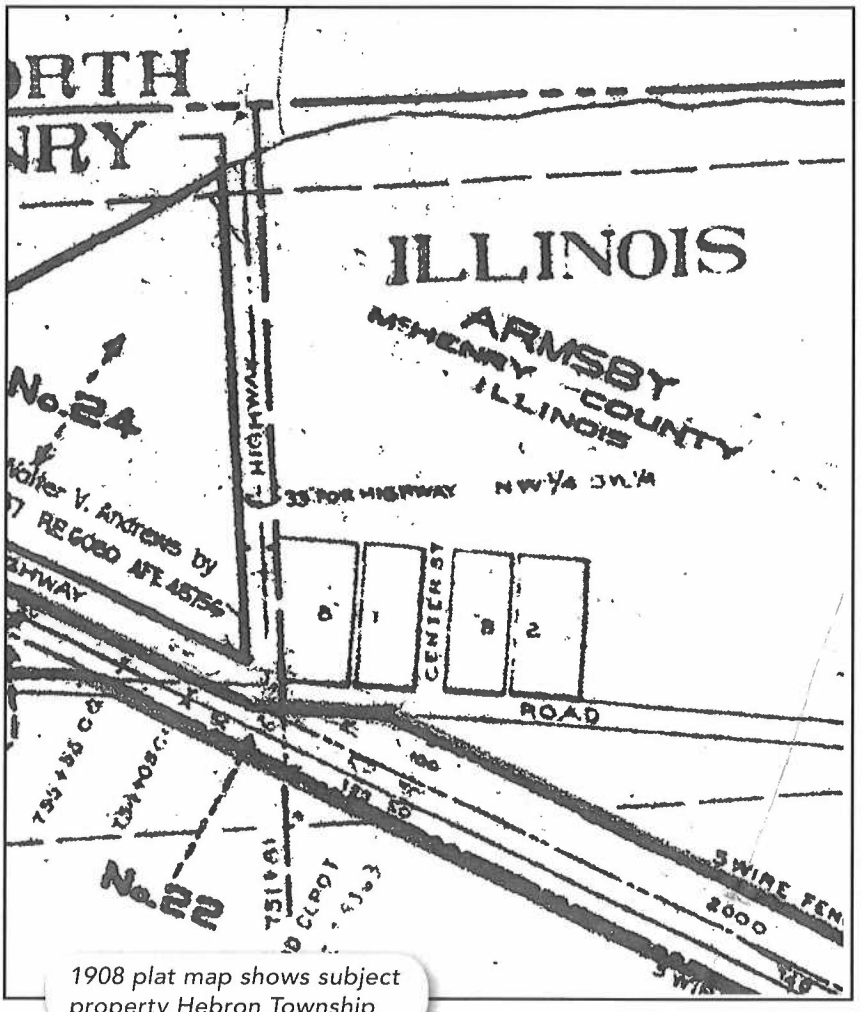

1908 plat map shows subject property Hebron Township

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Why would Andrews request a station? Armsby was located more than five miles to the northwest of Solon Mills, which had its own station. Richmond was located at least five miles to the east of Armsby. It's possible Andrews thought that the site of Armsby would allow area farmers, who were in an area monopolized by the Chicago and North Western, to cut their grain hauling travel time and perhaps even obtain cheaper shipping rates. The railroad also took a wider swath of land near the small passenger station to accommodate a holding pen for pigs heading to market.

If Solon Mills could have a station stop, why couldn't Armsby?

Could Andrews have been capitalizing on "insider information" available to him because of his possible service with the Milwaukee Road? Possibly. The founding of small villages along newly formed lines in railroad construction days was a fairly common occurrence. For example, Harvard's founder, Elbridge G. Ayer, clearly had connections.

The booklet, *Harvard: 150 Years*, notes that: "Mr. Ayer knew [that] there would be a railroad station five miles south of Big Foot Prairie (where Ayer was living) so he sold his store and bought 400 acres five miles south."

An August 1853 letter from William Butler Ogden, founder of the Chicago, St. Paul and Fond du Lac (now the Metra line to Harvard) to his brother states that he would be in the "area around Woodstock, Illinois" to solicit funds for the construction of the line.

The 1910 "Official Guide of the Railways ..." shows a listing of passenger trains, which ran over the Roundout to Janesville line. Passenger trains in that year, from Chicago to Janesville, actually stopped at Armsby at 9:41 a.m. and at 4:57 p.m., while trains from Janesville to Chicago stopped there at 6:33 a.m. and 6:34 p.m. A map of that Milwaukee Road published by that railroad in 1920 shows that Armsby was still a station stop in that year. Data from the office of the McHenry County Recorder of Deeds suggests that the railroad sold the station site back to Andrews in 1937.

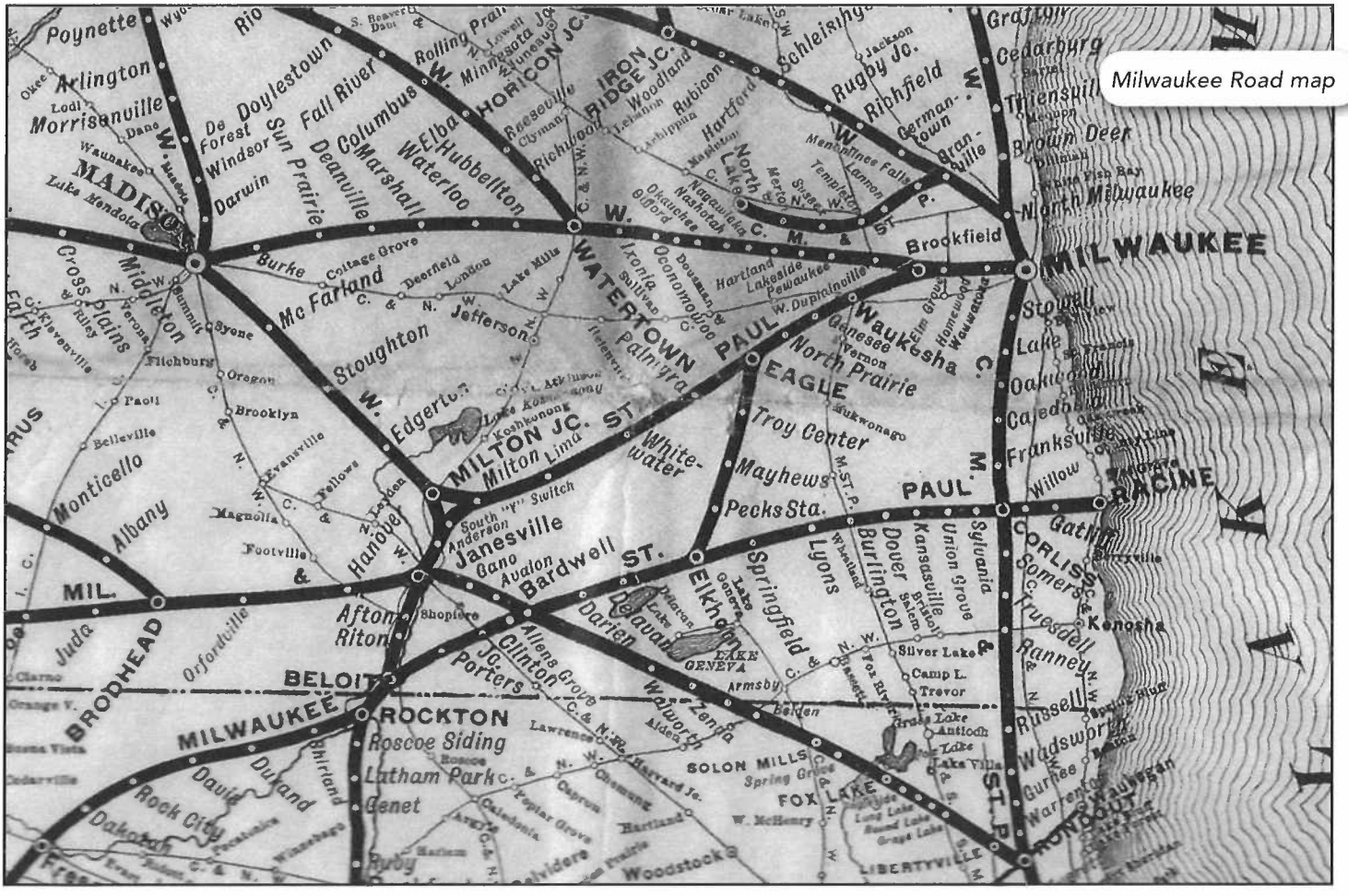
Lizzie Fenner Andrews died in Hebron March 3, 1914, and is buried in the Hebron Cemetery. Walter Andrews lived on in Hebron until he was hit by an automobile (Obituary, *Harvard Herald*, Feb. 5, 1942). He died in the Elkhorn hospital on Jan. 30, 1942, and is buried alongside his wife in the Hebron Cemetery.

Their son, Fenner Andrews, became a noted area undertaker. He died in 1965.

Today, absolutely nothing remains to show that a railroad depot once sat between Button Road and track, which now handles traffic on the Wisconsin, Wisconsin & Southern Railroad track. A horse pasture occupies the land of what was to be a community. A copse of woods with tangled underbrush covers the site of the depot. No one is alive today to be able to tell us how they climbed aboard a passenger train at Armsby to visit the big city.

Armsby is just a faded memory. ◆

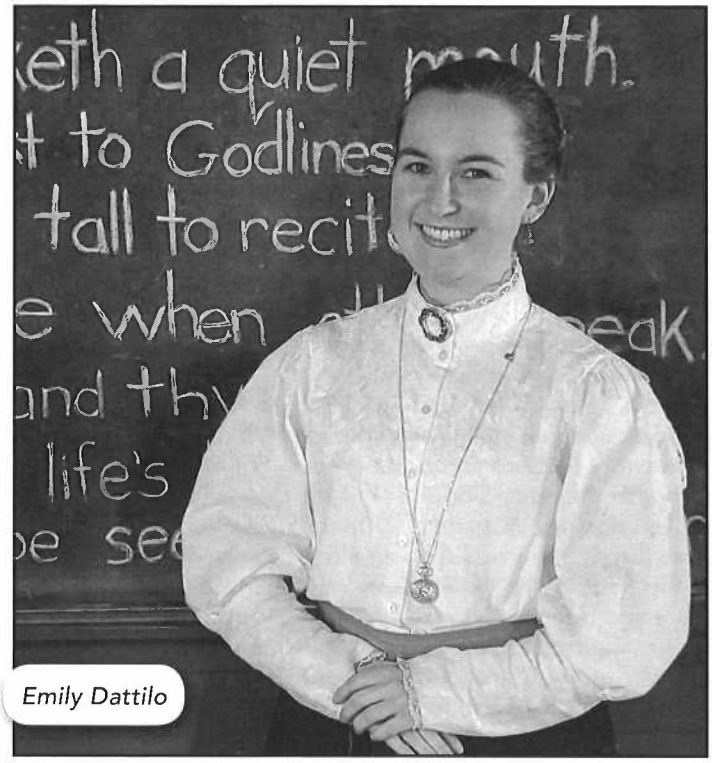
• *Kurt Begalka contributed to this story.*



Milwaukee Road map

Teaching in the 1890s dependent on good manners

BY EMILY DATTILO



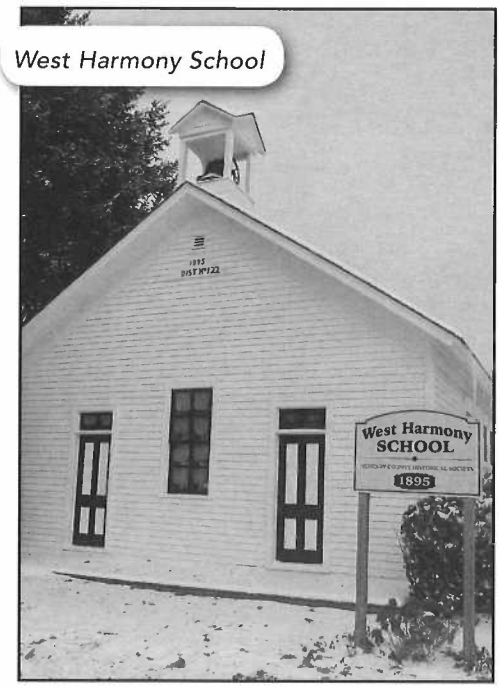
Emily Dattilo

A typical day in the life of an1890s schoolteacher began when the bell ran. However, the clamor of shuffling papers, excited whispers and smartphone texts was a replaced by a quiet respect.

A cheery "Good morning, ma'am" and bows and curtsies awaited their teacher.

Believe it or not, these manners tend to stick with the kids, at least for a little while. I'm usually greeted with a chorus of "Hi, ma'am!" and a shuffle of bows and curtsies when they see me walking on the grounds of Naper Settlement later in the day.

Next spring the McHenry County Historical Society will once again offer a two-hour program for up to 30 students in its one-room, 1895 West Harmony School. A more expansive, two-hour tour includes the 1895 West Harmony School, the museum and an 1843 log cabin. Available times are from 9 to 11 a.m., 9:30 to 11:30 a.m. or 10 a.m. to noon. Four weeks notice is preferred, whenever possible. The West Harmony program is free to schools whose townships and/or municipalities join the society as governmental members. Without a membership connection, there is a $3 charge per student to help defray expenses. Click on "School Tours" under the "Museum" tab on the society's website, www.gothistory.org, to learn about the various programs we offer.



West Harmony School

Originally located at 19114 Harmony Road in Marengo, West Harmony School closed in 1955. The building was relocated to Riley Center, behind the Riley Methodist Church, and used for storage.

In 1988 the McHenry County Historical Society moved the building once more to its museum campus in Union. Following two years of restoration, it opened to the public on Sept. 9, 1990. A 19-century school featured a compact design to better accommodate a range of human voices so students could hear. West Harmony measures 25 feet wide by 36 feet long with separate entrances for boys and girls.

Once the students are seated in the schoolhouse, girls on one side and boys on the other, teachers began the day by reciting the Pledge of Allegiance. This daily event actually throws off many students because the Pledge on the chalkboard is the original version, not the one they say in their 21st-century classrooms. When Francis Bellamy wrote the original Pledge of Allegiance in 1892 neither "the United States of America" nor "under God" were included. Those two phrases were added at two separate times during the first half of the 20th century in response to international relations.

The classroom rules also surprise visiting students. There's a list of 10 rules, from the turn of the century, on the chalkboard. Although there are a couple of generally positive rules – such as "Give thanks for life's blessings" – most are strict and intimidating. Four of the rules address being quiet in the classroom, with one of those being a favorite of grownups: "Children should be seen and not heard." (The kids aren't nearly as enthusiastic about that one.)

Society certainly held all children in the 1800s to very high standards of behavior, but in a one-room schoolhouse these rules were essential to a functioning classroom. One-room schools served first through eighth grades with one brave teacher in charge of every grade level's education. This means that the teacher required younger students to listen to the older students, who would have been helping her/him teach. It also was critical that students worked quietly so that everyone could focus on his or her own lessons. (It's worth noting that most children stopped attending school around fourth or fifth grade to begin apprenticeships or help on the farm.)

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In the 19th century consequences for breaking the rules could include physical punishment, such as a whack with the ruler, or public shaming, like wearing a sign at the front of the classroom, indicating bad behavior.

Visiting students practice all of the "Three R's" (reading, writing, and arithmetic), as did students in the 1890s. American students throughout the 19th century and into the 20th century learned to read from seven editions of the McGuffey Reader textbook. Each book consists of a collection of poems and short stories appropriate to certain reading levels and on a variety of subjects. I frequently assign poems called "Popping Corn" and "Life on a Farm" from the Fourth Edition, and the Second Edition has "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star." Unlike today, many reading assignments in the 1800s were read aloud in order to shape students into eloquent speakers, as well as talented readers.

Writing was a life-long skill for students and adults in the 19th century, but today's students would be hard-pressed to find paper and pens back then. In the 1800s children learned to write on a slate with chalk or using a slate pencil because it was cheaper and cleaner than paper and ink. Once students proved their handwriting was neat and legible, they could begin using ink and paper. This skill was especially important for older students who soon would be entering the adult world where business documents and receipts needed to be signed in ink.

Other subjects depended upon the education of an individual teacher. Whatever he or she knew was added to the students' lessons, but there were no other teachers at the school to fill in the gaps.

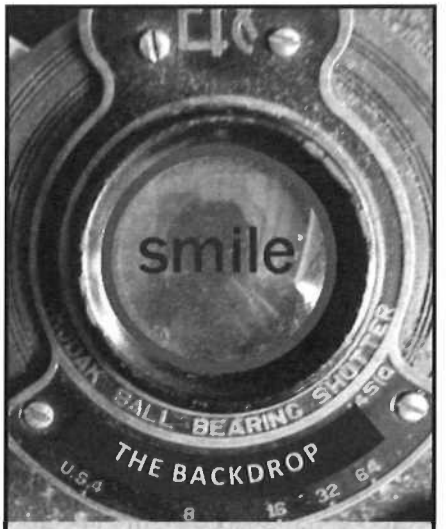
Overall, the "school day" program is only a quick overview of a basic 19th century education, but that's what the kids love about it. Students tell me all the time how much they love going to school where I teach, and how they don't want to leave. One second-grader even wrote me a thank you note on his slate. As much as adults complain about kids never putting down their technology, the pupils in my classroom never complain about missing that technology.

Perhaps they would mind the absence more if they always went to a one-room schoolhouse, but all the same it shows how meaningful a firsthand experience can be to a student.

I love seeing how strongly visitors react to this building. Kids (and adults!) can relate to the students who used to sit in those desks because education is a shared experience among many people of many backgrounds. A trip to the one-room schoolhouse prompts adults to get nostalgic and children to immediately compare it to their own classrooms.

When it comes down to it, many modern people spend a significant part of their lives in school and such schoolhouses help make that connection to the past. ◆

• *Emily Dattilo, a museum educator and a 19th-century teacher in the one-room schoolhouse at Naper Settlement in Naperville, is a former Collections Assistant at the McHenry County Historical Society & Museum. She also pens the history blog, The Walking Anachronism, available at https://thewalkinganachronism.wordpress.com/author/edattilo/,*



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The many impacts from World War I continue to be felt today in society

By KAITLIN McCANN

World War I and the years following was an era of dramatic change, development, and advancement for many aspects of American culture.

The changes were cultivated by Progressivism, which is the support of or advocacy for improvement of society by positive reform. The goal of progressivism is to lift society up by means of advancements in science, technology, economic development, and the creation of social organizations which are vital to the improvement of the human condition. This was achieved through several means, two of which were anti-war protests (and protests in general) and women securing the right to vote through the suffrage movement.

Although the women's suffrage movement had been gaining momentum for many years, progress in the early 1900s paved the path for continued advancements in American culture and society.

Due to the large number of men drafted when the United States joined the war in 1917, the number of women employed in industry increased greatly and the range of occupations open to them was extended. This challenged the traditional dominant gender roles in society that had previously confined women to the domestic sphere. This provided proof that women were competent in the workplace and eventually led to The Women's Bureau in the Department of Labor and many other labor unions which advocated for their welfare in the workplace. To create a powerful political and social movement, suffragists effectively utilized modern publicity and outreach methods, skillful organization, mobilization, and activism to raise support for their cause. Efforts paid off in 1920 with the passage of the 19th amendment when women in the United States earned the right to vote.

Women gaining the right to vote during the World War I era has had a profound effect on American culture and society, which has continued to fight for gender equality through 2019. In the intervening years many advancements were achieved such as the Equal Pay Act and Equal Employment Opportunity in the 1960s, the end to housing discrimination in the 1970s, and the end to the ban on women in military combat positions in 2013.

Specifically within Illinois and McHenry County, the Women's March in Chicago (for safety, education, respect and representation through social and civic activism) is just one positive way that our community participates in the endeavor for equality. Women are often underrepresented in schools and the workplace regarding science, technology, engineering and math fields (STEM). One way that McHenry County schools promote equal education opportunities is by partnering with "Gewalt Hamilton Associates Inc. Consulting Engineers" for "Introduce a Girl to Engineering Day". This program encourages young women to consider the possibilities of STEM related careers by showcasing the opportunities available, something that was not mainstream in the past. The "Project Lead the Way Program" implemented in McHenry County high schools provides additional support for females in the engineering field to help increase gender diversity.

During World War I, Illinois woman Jane Addams assumed a prominent role in the struggle for women's rights, which led to a wide range of protests on behalf of society as a whole.

There was much reluctance and dispute as to whether the United States should enter World War I and as a result anti-war parties formed. Jane Addams and other progressive women attended the International Congress of Women in 1915, passively attempting to stop the war. She eventually founded the Women's Peace Party, which became the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom in 1919.

In addition to peace protests, Addams spearheaded reform in many other areas including civil liberties, women's suffrage, child labor, and support for immigration during the early 20th century which resulted in much success. She also aided in the founding of and participated in many organizations including the American Civil Liberties Union, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, National Child Labor Committee, National Playground Association, and the National Conference of Social Work, which improved living and working conditions for all Americans.

Throughout the past century, Americans have increasingly been empowered to stand up for what they believe in by giving speeches, participating in protests, and sharing their opinions through other means such as social media. Martin Luther King Jr. was an influential activist of civil rights at another critical time in history. His famous "I Have a Dream" speech delivered in 1963 at the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom captivated audiences and again ushered change in American culture politically and socially. Dr. King's speech would not have been possible without the prior progresses secured during the years of World War I.

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Recent examples in which our local community has benefited from World War I-era advancements include freedom of union workers to protest and for students to voice their concerns for safety in their schools. McHenry County's annual "March for Our Lives" in Woodstock protested against gun violence and for safer school environments. This event was created and led by students who were inspired to make the world a safer, more peaceful place. Additionally, many union workers have spoken out against unfair treatment through striking. A famous example would be the teacher strikes in Chicago that have taken place in the last few years.

World War I was more than just a military battle. It fostered radical changes in American society that would continue to build upon the legacy of change for generations to come. Woodrow Wilson stated this would be the "war to end all wars" but unfortunately this was not the case. What we have learned is that progress is not a destination, but rather a journey. We are encouraged by the positive advancements from the WWI era that demonstrate how peaceful protest and the struggle for equality builds a better society that we all experience in our great nation today.

• *Kaitlin McCann is the 2019 Nancy Fike Scholarship winner. The Woodstock North High School graduate is studying global studies, history and dance at St. Mary's College in Indiana.*

New Members

Terry Cowles, Pleasant Prairie
Denise Kawa, Union
Eileen Faut, McHenry
James Popovich, Crystal Lake
Kurt Pearson, McHenry
Dianne Siekmann, Mundelein
Tom Altemus, Tucson AZ
Pam Dean, McHenry
Katherine Vorisek, Chicago
Kristi Oakes, Crystal Lake
Bernadine Schert, Volo
Georgiann Baldino, Village of Lakewood
Stew Cohen, Crystal Lake
Donald & Gayle Smolinski, Huntley
Robert Guritz, Evanstone
Ed Polonus, Peoria
Gloria & Ted Weidner, Harvard
Judi Szilak/ Dennis G. Smith, McHenry
Allison MacCready, Crystal Lake
Michele Slowinski, Crystal Lake
Gray Family, Woodstock
Cathie Scherman, Crystal Lake
Peter Janko, Marengo
Kathy & John Hurley, Union
Janet & Robert Alley, Marengo
Margaret O'Grady Kennedy, Woodstock
Petersen Family, Crystal Lake
Helen Wiederkehr, Huntley
Jane Sarbaugh, Woodstock
Case & Sally Ellis, Cary
Tom & Marianne Pigott, Woodstock
Carol Larson, Harvard
JoAnne Younger, Marengo
Janice & Tom Brockner, Elgin
Joe & Liz Henning, Marengo
Joanne Matik & Keith Schoepke, Crystal Lake
Bob & Maureen Horrell, Woodstock
Nancy E. Wagner, Crystal Lake
Gail A. Peterson, Fox Lake
George Killis & Jeannie Ridings, Crystal Lake
Peggy Kmoch, Marengo

Being in the right place at the right time helped MCHS dodge a bullet

By DON HILDEBRAND

When in the course of human events there is a dramatic moment about to become a catastrophic event and that catastrophe is, by pure luck and a former wise decision, avoided, the potential happening is quickly forgotten and goes unrecorded in history.

This writing is intended to describe such an event in the early life of the McHenry County Historical Museum in Union, Illinois during the early winter of 1975.

Some of the details in the story may not be exactly correct due to my memory limitations, the actual happening and sequence is very true.

~ Don Hildebrand

McHenry County Historical Society, at the suggestion of its leader Dorothy McEachren, purchased the vacant 1870 Union High School building at a public auction in 1971. Her objective was to repurpose it as a county history museum.

Incorporated in 1963, MCHS had some donated artifacts scattered in various places, but no permanent home. After the purchase, about four years were spent gathering more artifacts and converting the building into displays for public viewing.

The McHenry County Historical Museum officially opened to the public on July 4, 1976 – our country's bicentennial year. The 1870, two-story stone and brick building sat on about 2 acres along Main Street in Union. The original building featured room additions in 1928 and a gymnasium in 1948. The building was vacated in 1969 by Union District 8 school board when an addition was added to the newer Evergreen Park School in town.

Several century old cottonwood trees adorned the property. A Mobil service station and garage was located across Main Street, directly west of the school. A single-story, frame warehouse was across Washington Street to the south. Single-family residences bordered the school within a few feet of the school building to the east.

The original 1870 building had a large wooden frame bell tower above the roof.

I served on the MCHS board of directors and as treasurer at the time of a nearly catastrophic event. After the school building was purchased in 1971, the board was concerned about the safety of the building while it was unoccupied. The concern mostly was about the possibility of vandalism and burglary. In our town of about 600 people, law enforcement amounted to a part-time local cop and our McHenry County Sheriff's Department.

There was an outside alarm bell that was activated

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Union School circa 1890s

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if an exterior door was opened when the building was unoccupied. It was loud and could be heard all over town. Since I was the only board member/officer who lived in Union, about 200 yards from the museum, I answered several calls from responding deputies. Only one such call was because of a "break in." Two teenagers broke a window in the kitchen area to enter and got "spooked" once inside. They opened an overhead door to escape and the alarm sounded.

Alarm sensors were on the front door and the gym overhead door and the false alarms stemmed from switch malfunctions or lightning. We should have been more concerned about fire than theft or vandalism. The village had a volunteer fire department, two pumper trucks, and an elevated ball-shaped water tower. More concerning is that the school building had no working fire alarm.

Our MCHS board decided, shortly after acquiring the building, to convert what was the school office into a small apartment big enough for two people. This was done. The idea was to seek an adult couple that would take up residence in the apartment, rent-free just to have someone on the premises at night and weekends. In hindsight, that was a wise decision.

I believe our first occupant was a young, single man who occupied the apartment for about a year. The next occupants were a couple. The man traveled some in his work, but the wife was there most of the time.

I don't remember the exact year or month that the near catastrophic event I am relating occurred, but I believe it was in the early winter of 1974 or 1975. I believe the museum still had not opened to the public. I do well remember that sometime between 9 and 10 p.m. I got a phone call from the lady tenant. Since I was the only board member living in Union, I was used to getting calls at irregular hours to perform some duty for the museum or for an alarm incident.

The lady said, "I'm here in the museum by myself and I can't get the heating system to shut off. It is extremely hot in here, even with the windows open." I was familiar with the hot water heating system for the school building. A gas-fired boiler in the basement, under the 1928 addition, heated water in a closed system, which was pumped to various radiators in the building. I had been doing "handyman" work around the museum and was familiar with the basement layout.

I advised our tenant that I would come right over to see what could be done. In about four minutes I was at the building, where I noted a door and some windows were open. The lady met me at the door and I immediately noted that she had just cause for alarm. The building's interior was extremely hot. I immediately opened the basement door and descended a short flight of stairs. The furnace greeted me with a roaring fire in the firebox. Part of the sheet metal on top of the firebox was a cherry red. The whole furnace was smoking due to burning paint. The heated water pipes were pinging and clanging as they were trying to expand from the heat.

I immediately went to the main gas shutoff valve to the furnace and turned off the gas fuel. The fire went out and the system began to cool down. An examination of the furnace by a technician the next day confirmed that the furnace was a complete loss and the firebox ruined. The water pipes were twisted beyond repair or replacement.

The hot water heating system for the building was never used again.

The museum survived the winter with the use of electric space heaters and essentially leaving a large part of the building unheated in cold weather. No big deal was made of what could have happened. But over the years I have relived that situation and speculated on what could have happened had no one been there when the thermostat switch and the high temperature safety shutoff switches on the furnace failed.

In my opinion, when I shut off the gas supply valve to the furnace, the basement was within minutes of exploding into a flaming fire. The heat was intense. The 50-year-old dry wood floor joists, just a few inches above the furnace were about to burst into flame. The small amount of asbestos insulation above the furnace could not have prevented it.

Once on fire, the flames would have traveled quickly through the old wood floor and into the stairwell leading to the second floor and the attic. The bell tower, being directly connected to the attic by a short ladder, would undoubtedly made the bell tower a type of chimney for the whole building. In a very short time the building would have been engulfed in uncontrollable fire – even with the assistance of neighboring fire departments.

If a strong west wind was blowing, a not uncommon event, the flames from the school building would attack the nearby homes where the fire might have jumped from one house to the next.

So, what if the MCHS directors had not provided a person in the building when the furnace switches failed and the furnace continued to run wild until it flashed into flames? Credit the board's wisdom and a little plain dumb luck for preventing the loss of that old school building on a cold winter's night. ◆

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Daughter of the American Revolution embodies volunteerism to a "tea"

NAME: Caroline Pharr Sobolak
AGE: 70
TOWN WHERE I LIVE NOW: Cary
HOMETOWN: Pittsburgh, Pa.
FAMILY (spouse/children): I have two grown children, Brian and Christine, and five grandchildren and I've been married for 48 years to my husband, Bill.
EDUCATION: Bachelor's degree in home economics education, Penn State University; master's degree in communications, Wheaton College; master's degree in education - special education, Northern Illinois University.
FAVORITE MOVIE: Too many to name just one
LAST CD BOUGHT: Les Misérables
WINE OR BEER: Wine
STEAK OR SALAD: Salad
KETCHUP OR MUSTARD ON A HOT DOG: Mustard
FUNNY/INTERESTING THING PEOPLE TYPICALLY DON'T KNOW ABOUT YOU: People are always surprised to learn I used to smoke and I taught Home Economics. I love education and learning more than history.

TRACER: What is your role with the McHenry County Historical Society?
SOBOLAK: I volunteer at the Admissions Desk on Wednesdays, and I've done work on grants. I recently helped secure a donation for conservation and historical preservation at the Pringle School.

TRACER: How long have you been here?
SOBOLAK: I've been a member for over 10 years and an active volunteer for over 1 year.

TRACER: What prompted you to choose this organization?
SOBOLAK: I love history and volunteering at MCHS dovetails nicely with my volunteer activity for the Kishwaukee Trail of the National Society Daughters of the American Revolution.

TRACER: Why history? What is it about this career that trips your trigger?
SOBOLAK: Growing up, my dad never missed a historical marker or museum when traveling. I lived in Philadelphia for eight years and visited all the historical sites where our country was born.

TRACER: What is the best part of working at the museum?
SOBOLAK: I like meeting interesting people and feeling like I help the museum through volunteering.

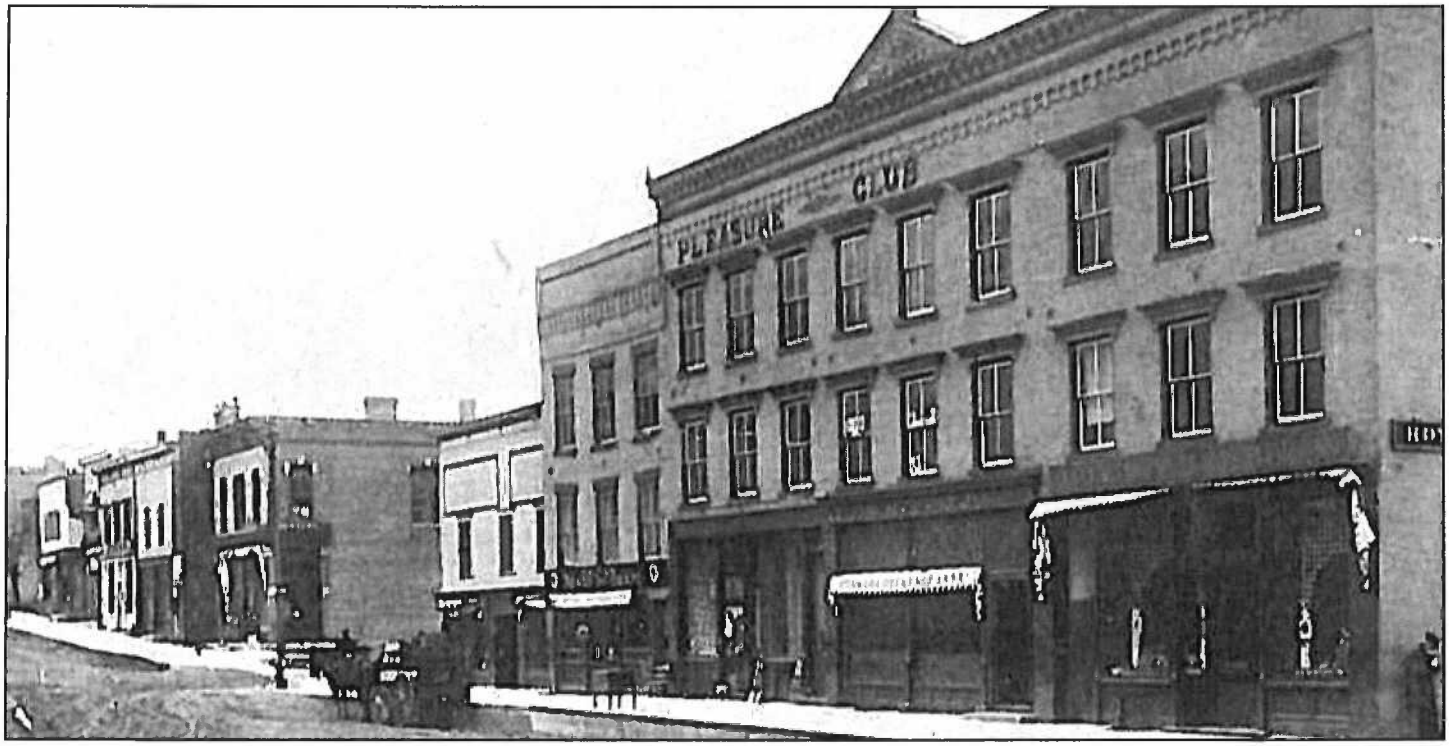
TRACER: What are your long-term goals?
SOBOLAK: My goal is to put my feet on the ground in the morning as long as possible.

TRACER: How did you get to where you are today?
SOBOLAK: My life demonstrates what I believe: Perseverance is the key to success. You've just got to pick yourself up and keep going.

TRACER: Do you have a mentor? If so, who, and describe how he/she influenced you.
SOBOLAK: My husband. He's steadfast. He's kind and he's stood by me during the last 48 years. He's just a good man. He's just my rock.

TRACER: Do you have a favorite memory of a great day at the Historical Society?
SOBOLAK: One August day, I brought my 10-year-old grandson to the museum while I volunteered at the admissions desk. I felt a bit leery that I might be subjecting him to three hours of inactivity. He LOVED all of it – the cow that mooed, the tourist cabin from the '50s, the store, and the jail. He kept busy exploring the whole time. I didn't need to worry. ◆

Summer Mystery Photo



The Pleasure Club was a social club that boasted a pool table, weights and exercise equipment, and a library... all designed to give young men positive alternatives. Members even put on plays at the Opera House. Betty Waspi of Twin Lakes, Wis., knew that the three-story building was located on the north side of the Woodstock Square.

Autumn Mystery Photo

This building was a pivotal part of the Harvard community in the early 1900s.
Do you know what its purpose was and where it was located in town?

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New at the Library...

- *The Domestic Architect:* Comprising a series of original designs for rural and ornamental cottages with full and complete explanations and directions to the builder. By Oliver P. Smith. Phinney & Co., Buffalo, N .Y., 1854.
- *Illinois Farm Bureau Magazine*, Illinois Agricultural Association. 1960 and 1961.
- *Ritual of the Order of the Eastern Star.* Order of the Eastern Star, Woodstock. Cira 1956. Washington, D.C.
- Woodstock High School fall sports, 1978.
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- *McHenry County Home Bureau Cookbook:* Our Favorite Recipes, Woodstock, 1953.
- *Log-o-Life*, Lawrence L. Foley. McMillin-Foley Publishing Co., 1945. Presented to Karl Bradford.
- Appointment book from Kuhn's Barber Shop, Woodstock. Sept. 9-Dec. 3, 1951, 1974, 1977.
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- *Modern Living Magazine.* Issued by Woodstock Insurance Agency, Inc., Woodstock. November-December 1977, all of 1978, January-April 1979.
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- Pleasant Valley Outdoor Center building correspondence – 1953-54. Community Renewal Society of Chicago United Methodist Church of Christ.
- Eckert family picture album from the 1950s. From Floyd E. Eckert Sr.
- Letters and correspondence during World War II (Nov. 17, 1942 – Nov. 8, 1944) From Floyd Eckert Jr.
- Abstract of Title: A.W. Magill, Dorr Township, Woodstock.
- Homemakers Extension Association scrapbook – 1977 through 2016.
- "On To 2050" plan Executive Summary, Chicago Metropolitan Agency of Planning, 2018.